

## Message Text

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PAGE 01 MANAGU 04810 141816Z

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 PA-01

PRS-01 SP-02 CU-02 IO-13 /037 W  
----- 061994

R 141624Z OCT 76

FM AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1357

INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

AMEMBASSY CARACAS

AMEMBASSY PANAMA

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AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO

AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO

USIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L MANAGUA 4810

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, HO, VE, CI, UY, GT, PE, CS EC, NU

SUBJECT: JOURNALISTS' MEETING IN MANAGUA

SUMMARY: ABOUT 80 FORIEGN JOURNALISTS AND 120 NICARAGUANS AND DIPLOMATS ACCREDITED IN NICARAGUA GATHERED IN MANAGUA'S RUBEN DARIO THEATER FOR THE OPENING SESSION OF THE FIRST INTER-AMERICAN ENCOUNTER OF DEMOCRATIC JOURNALISTS, AN EVENT SPONSORED BY THE GON. SPEAKERS, INCLUDING PRESIDENT SOMOZA, DENOUNCED COMMUNIST SUBVERSION AND STRESSED THE NEED FOR A "RESPONSIBLE PRESS." SOME SUPPORT WAS VOICED FOR UNESCO'S PROPOSAL FOR THE IMPOSITION OF "NATIONAL CODES" ON THE NEWS MEDIA. THE TENOR OF THE SPEECHES INDICATES THAT THE NICARAGUAN GOVERNMENT MAY BE ATTEMPTING TO LAY THE GROUNDWORK FOR AN INDEFINITE EXTENSION OF CENSORSHIP. END SUMMARY

1. ABOUT 200 PERSONS, INCLUDING APPROXIMATELY 80 FOREIGN JOURNALISTS, MET IN MANAGUA'S RUBEN DARIO THEATER ON OCTOBER 9 FOR THE OPENING SESSION OF THE FIRST INTER-AMERICAN ENCOUNTER OF DEMO-  
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PAGE 02 MANAGU 04810 141816Z

CRATIC JOURNALISTS, AN EVENT SPONSORED AND FINANCED BY THE GON.

THE AUDIENCE HEARD SPEECHES BY FATHER MIGUEL CHAVERRY, THE ARCH-BISHOPRIC OF MANAGUA'S PUBLIC RELATIONS DIRECTOR, SECRETARY OF INFORMATION AND PRESS ROGER BERMUDEZ, HOUSING BANK PRESIDENT FAUSTO ZELAYA, NATIONAL JOURNALISTS' ASSOCIATION PRESIDENT JULIO TALAVERA TORRES, ALL NICARAGUANS, HONDURAN DELEGATE AMILCAR SANTAMARIA, AND PRESIDENT SOMOZA. WITH THE EXCEPTION OF FATHER CHAVERRY, WHO DENOUNCED "TOTALITARIANISM IN ANY OF ITS FORMS", THE SPEAKERS STRESSED THE DANGER OF COMMUNIST SUBVERSION. THE MOST BELLICOSE SPEECH WAS THAT OF MR. ZELAYA. AFTER PRAISING UNESCO DIRECTOR-GENERAL M'BOW FOR HAVING PROPOSED "NATIONAL CODES" FOR THE NEWS MEDIA, ZELAYA ATTACKED THE MEDIA THAT "MAKES A LIVING OF LYING" AND WONDERED WHETHER GOVERNMENTS SHOULD PERMIT "THE COLLECTIVE POISONING PRACTICED BY CERTAIN INFORMATION MEDIA AND BY JOURNALISTS WHO PROMOTE LIES AND CALUMNY". ANSWERING HIS OWN QUESTION, ZELAYA STATED THAT "OUR ANSWER IS CATEGORICAL AND CO-INCIDES WITH THE UNESCO PROPOSAL: THE GOVERNMENT HAS TO ADOPT THE NECESSARY MEASURES TO ENSURE THAT ITS SUBJECTS DO NOT CONTINUE TO BE SUBVERTED."

2. IN HIS SPEECH SOMOZA SAID THAT IT WOULD SEEM PARADOXICAL THAT SUCH A MEETING SHOULD BE HELD IN A COUNTRY UNDER MARTIAL LAW (CENSORSHIP) BUT THAT THE FACT THAT IS BEING HOSTED BY THE GON IS PROOF OF NICARAGUA'S COMMITMENT TO THE PRINCIPLE OF FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION. HE DEPLORED THE NECESSITY OF MARTIAL LAW (CENSORSHIP) BUT APPEARED TO JUSTIFY IT BY SAYING THAT NICARAGUA IS THE OBJECT OF CUBAN AGGRESSION AND THAT AS PRESIDENT IT IS HIS DUTY TO USE ALL CONSTITUTIONAL MEANS AT HIS DISPOSAL "TO NORMALIZE THE SITUATION."

3. ACCORDING TO KNOWLEDGEABLE SOURCES ABOUT 1,000 PERSONS HAD BEEN INVITED TO THE OPENING SESSION, BUT ONLY ABOUT 200 ATTENDED, INCLUDING THE APPROXIMATELY 80 FOREIGN GUESTS WHOSE TRANSPORTATION AND LODGING EXPENSES WERE PAID BY THE GON. A NUMBER OF DIPLOMATS ACCREDITED IN NICARAGUA ALSO ATTENDED, INCLUDING THE AMBASSADORS OF VENEZUELA, CHILE, URUGAY, GUATEMALA, PERU, COSTA RICA, AND ECUADOR, AND THE CARGE D'AFFAIRES OF HONDURAS. OF THE MANAGUA CORRESPONDENTS OF INTERNATIONAL NEWS AGENCIES ONLY ONE, THAT OF REUTERS, ATTENDED; THE UPI, AP, AND ACAN/EFE CORRESPONDENTS WERE NOWHERE TO BE SEEN.

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PAGE 03     MANAGU 04810 141816Z

4. THERE WERE CRITICISMS OF THE ENCOUNTER BY SOME OF THE NICARAGUANS JOURNALISTS PRESENT BECAUSE A NUMBER OF THE FOREIGN "JOURNALISTS" WHO HAD BEEN INVITED WERE NOT JOURNALISTS AT ALL. A CONVERSATION WITH SOME MEMBERS OF THE U.S. DELEGATION SEEMED TO BEAR THIS CRITICISM OUT. OF THE FIVE MEMBERS OF THE U.S. DELEGATION WITH WHOM POLOFF HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO SPEAK, ONE, LT. GEN. DANIEL GRAHAM, WAS A RETIRED OFFICER WHO ADMITTED THAT HE HAD BEEN INVITED BECAUSE HE WAS A FORMER CLASSMATE AND FRIEND OF SOMOZA,

ANOTHER, DR. VICTOR FEDIAY, SAID THAT HE WAS A STAFF AIDE TO SENATOR STROM THURMOND, ANOTHER, SOMEONE NAMED ROBERTS, WAS AN EMPLOYEE OF A CONSERVATIVE POLITICAL ORGANIZATION, ANOTHER, RAYMOND MOLINA, WAS IDENTIFIED AS A BUSINESS PARTNER OF SOMOZA WHO RESIDES IN NICARAGUA, AND ONE SEEMED TO BE A BONA FIDE JOURNALIST. POLOFF ALSO LEARNED THAT SOME PRO-GOVERNMENT JOURNALISTS WERE BOYCOTTING THE ENCOUNTER BECAUSE OF THE FAILURE OF THE ORGANIZER, JOURNALISTS' ASSOCIATION PRESIDENT TALAVERA TORRES, TO SPREAD AROUND SOME OF THE MONEY THAT HE HAD RECEIVED FOR THE EVENT. ACCORDING TO AN INFORMED SOMOCISTA SOURCE, THE GON HAS SPENT AT LEAST BETWEEN U.S.\$50,000 AND \$60,000 ON THE ENCOUNTER, OF WHICH THE ORGANIZERS POCKETED NO LESS THAN U.S.\$7,000. COMMENT: THE GON HAS BEEN STUNG BY CRITICISMS OF PRESS CENSORSHIP IN NICARAGUA, AND THE ENCOUNTER OF DEMOCRATIC JOURNALISTS IS CLEARLY AN ATTEMPT TO REFURBISH THE GON'S IMAGE, POSSIBLY IN ANTICIPATION OF A CONDEMNATION OF NICARAGUA BY THE INTER-AMERICAN PRESS ASSOCIATION, WHICH IS NOW HOLDING ITS ANNUAL MEETING IN WILLIAMSBURG, VA. THE TENOR OF THE SPEECHES WITH THEIR STRESS ON THE DANGER OF SUBVERSION AND THE NEED FOR A "RESPONSIBLE PRESS" SUGGESTS THAT THE GON MAY BE ATTEMPTING TO LAY THE GROUNDWORK FOR AN INDEFINITE EXTENSION OF CENSORSHIP.

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## Message Attributes

**Automatic Decaptioning:** X  
**Capture Date:** 01 JAN 1994  
**Channel Indicators:** n/a  
**Current Classification:** UNCLASSIFIED  
**Concepts:** JOURNALISTS, MEETING REPORTS  
**Control Number:** n/a  
**Copy:** SINGLE  
**Draft Date:** 14 OCT 1976  
**Decaption Date:** 01 JAN 1960  
**Decaption Note:**  
**Disposition Action:** RELEASED  
**Disposition Approved on Date:**  
**Disposition Authority:** BoyleJA  
**Disposition Case Number:** n/a  
**Disposition Comment:** 25 YEAR REVIEW  
**Disposition Date:** 28 MAY 2004  
**Disposition Event:**  
**Disposition History:** n/a  
**Disposition Reason:**  
**Disposition Remarks:**  
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**Document Source:** CORE  
**Document Unique ID:** 00  
**Drafter:** n/a  
**Enclosure:** n/a  
**Executive Order:** GS  
**Errors:** N/A  
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**Previous Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
**Reference:** n/a  
**Review Action:** RELEASED, APPROVED  
**Review Authority:** BoyleJA  
**Review Comment:** n/a  
**Review Content Flags:**  
**Review Date:** 28 APR 2004  
**Review Event:**  
**Review Exemptions:** n/a  
**Review History:** RELEASED <28 APR 2004 by RowellE0>; APPROVED <12 AUG 2004 by BoyleJA>  
**Review Markings:**

Margaret P. Grafeld  
Declassified/Released  
US Department of State  
EO Systematic Review  
04 MAY 2006

**Review Media Identifier:**  
**Review Referrals:** n/a  
**Review Release Date:** n/a  
**Review Release Event:** n/a  
**Review Transfer Date:**  
**Review Withdrawn Fields:** n/a  
**Secure:** OPEN  
**Status:** NATIVE  
**Subject:** JOURNALISTS' MEETING IN MANAGUA SUMMARY: ABOUT 80 FOREIGN JOURNALISTS AND 120 NICARAGUANS AND DIPLOMATS ACCREDITED IN NICARAGUA GATHERED IN MANA  
**TAGS:** PFOR, HO, VE, CI, UY, GT, PE, CS, EC, NU  
**To:** STATE  
**Type:** TE  
**Markings:** Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006